

and Hamford. Not very many readers, perhaps, will struggle their whole way through the book; and of those who do even fewer will follow, point by point, its exceedingly repetitious, but at the same time involuntarily apologetic. But all this nearly all will come from it with a bemused expression. In all this turning and wheeling around a few points, something must have been proved, somebody must have been exposed. And as such the book will enter the folklore of history.

Mr. Walsley is interested, chiefly, in the events of the day of Peterloo, and even more closely in the events of one half-hour of that day—between 1.15 and 1.45 p.m.—from the time when Henry Hunt arrived on the hustings to the time when the field was empty of all but shawls, bonnets, sticks, and cavalry adjusting their saddles. Obsessively he rides up and down that field and its environs, obsessively he rides up and down the five or ten minutes between the arrival of the Yeomanry at the edge of the field and the dispersal of the crowd, summoning witnesses in the newspaper press of the weeks following, dragging them back by their collars, making them pace over the yards before and behind the hustings, cross-examining reminiscences and confronting them with conflicting depositions, galloping off into the suburbs of the twentieth century to interrogate suspicious stragglers, like F. A. Bruton, the author of the careful *The Story of Peterloo* (1919).

At the centre of his obsession is this: what happened on that day was unintentional, and the crowd (or part of it) was the first aggressor. The magistrates in their house overlooking the hustings were justly alarmed by the proceedings, both by tumults which had preceded August 16 and by the radical rhetoric and military array of the crowd on the day. With a nice sense of legalistic propriety they waited until Hunt and his fellow speakers were on the hustings and then ordered the constables to arrest them; this Joseph Nadin, the deputy-constable, refused to do without military aid; the magistrates sent for Yeomanry and Hussars, and the Yeomanry arrived first, fortuitously; the Yeomanry were ordered to support the constables in the execution of the warrant, and they advanced in reasonable order and without aggressive intention or action into the crowd; but the crowd then closed in upon them in a menacing manner and the Yeomanry were assailed, at some point, by the hustings, by brickbats and sticks hurled by a portion of the crowd; most of the Yeomanry kept their heads until Hunt and his fellows had been arrested, and then, increasingly assailed

by brickbats and hemmed in on all sides by a threatening crowd, were forced to beat off their attackers (with the flimsy of their sabres) in self-defence. The magistrates, observing their predicament in the midst of a threatening multitude, were forced to order the Hussars to come to their rescue and to clear the field. All followed on. And the radicals have made party-political propaganda out of their own aggression ever since.

One needs a book like this, every now and then, to recall that the patron saint of historians is St. Sisypheus, before we enquire what facts he has actually achieved. Mr. Walsley must be acquitted of one charge. He is certainly not guilty of wilful suppression or distortion, although there are many inconvenient facts unmentioned and others which are bludgeoned into unrecognizable pulp. He could not have written this book unless he believed in its truth, obsessively. One bit in true Church-and-King belief, an authentic descendant and vindicator of the shopkeepers on horseback who made up the Manchester Yeomanry, could have catered, brandishing his sword of polemic, into so many blind alleys of argument as he has. The printed word, to historians, long known and readily available—documents which he quotes, he quotes repetitiously and in full.

Yet the fact is that Mr. Walsley has no new facts to add about this half-hour. His book is a sustained essay in special pleading about minutiae, in which he is very much disposed to believe that A did happen and very much disposed to believe that B did not happen. Such a conviction, sustained over 500 pages, is bound—whatever the press of defenceless facts against it—to reach the hustings in the end and to cut down the "radical" flags. Nevertheless, let us follow Mr. Walsley on to his chosen part of the field.

Did the Yeomanry ride quietly up to the hustings to effect the arrests, or did they (as "radicals" mythologize) begin to strike out with their sabres from their first entry into the crowd? Were they attacked, before they reached the hustings, by sticks and brickbats? The overwhelming majority of witnesses to these events may be suspected of "prejudice," as parties to the event, since the greater part belonged to the crowd who were ridden into, and the remainder belonged to the magistracy, special constables, and the Yeomanry who did the riding. Their evidence is not therefore worthless, since they were subject to cross-examination in the courts, and betrayed the customary signs of veracity or incoherence. However, historians, from 1819 until 1969, have attempted to simplify the ex-

treme difficulties of sifting this evidence and the reports of partisan newspapers, on either side) by looking for witnesses who cannot be accused of belonging in any obvious sense, to either of the contending parties. There are a few such observers: uncommitted on the fringes of the crowd; householders whose windows overlooked the field; and (notably) several press reporters who were afforded places on the hustings—John Tyas of *The Times*, John Smith of the *Liverpool Mercury*, Edward Baines of the *Leeds Mercury*—and the Rev. Edward Stanley, a clergyman who had private business on that day with Mr. Buxton, who owned the house which the magistrates chose as their headquarters, and who stayed on to observe the whole affair from a window directly above the magistrates.

Mr. Stanley, in a careful account written within a few months of the affair, was unequivocal. On the hustings, for example: "I indeed saw no missile weapons used throughout the whole transaction, but . . . the dust at the hustings soon partially obscured everything that took place near that particular spot." Mr. Walsley seizes upon this honest statement as merely negative: Stanley could not see the brickbats because of the dust. (He does not notice that, if he accepts Stanley's testimony here, he must for the same reason question Hunt's testimony at the trial of Hunt: "When the Yeomanry advanced to the hustings I saw bricks and stones flying . . . since Hunt's viewpoint was almost identical to that of Stanley, and magistrates must peer through the same dust as clergyman. Uncommitted witnesses, however, can be found on the hustings, beyond the rising dust. Thus Tyas, who was reporting from the hustings, on the Yeomanry's approach to the hustings: "Not a brickbat was thrown at them. . . . during this period." Mr. Walsley gets around this by quoting Captain Birley, the scarcely impartial witness who commanded the Yeomanry on the field, to the effect that the first attack was made upon his men at the rear of the hustings, which Tyas could not observe. Mr. Walsley does not repeat the evidence of Smith (at Hunt's trial) who was over six feet high and had a good viewpoint to the left of the hustings:

I saw no stone or brick-bat thrown at them; in my judgement, if my stones or brick-bats had been thrown I was in a situation likely to have seen it, my eyes and countenance were in a direction towards the military up in the moment of their reaching the hustings.

The question of the manner in which the Yeomanry approached the hustings is much the same. Smith

declared in a letter to the Earl of Derby written two days after Peterloo that they "rushed upon the people, cutting right and left," and repeated the same general testimony in Redford v. Birley three years later. He did not attest to the fact during the intervening trial of Hunt, presumably because, as he was led by counsel through his evidence, he was not asked this question; but Mr. Walsley finds the omission so significant as to be sinister and to discredit his whole evidence—he "thought fit to nullify" his "first impressions" when under oath.

The Rev. Edward Stanley receives very much the same treatment. His testimony (which influenced the accounts of those two "radical" writers, F. A. Bruton and Dr. Read) was plain:

It has often been asked when and where the cavalry struck the people. I can only say that from the moment they began to force their way through the crowd towards the hustings swords were up and swords were down, but whether they fell with the sharp or flat side, of course I cannot pretend to give an opinion.

Mr. Walsley demolishes this by showing that, three years later, in the action of Redford v. Birley, "Stanley's testimony under oath was not the testimony given in his narrative."

Did you watch the advance of the cavalry from their place up to the hustings?

I did.

Did you see either sticks, or stones or anything of the kind used against the cavalry in their advance up to the hustings?

Certainly not.

Did you see any resistance whatever to the cavalry, except the thickness of the meeting?

None.

Do I understand you to say you saw them surround the hustings, or not?

Surround I could not say, for the entire side of the hustings, of course, was partially eclipsed by the people upon it. But you saw them encircle part? Encircle part.

Did you see what was done when they got there?

I saw the swords up and down, the orders, imprecated or thrown over, and the mob dispersed.

Mr. Walsley—and it must be insisted that this is a fair example of his method—is seized with the misapprehension that the juxtaposition of these two passages of Stanley's amount to an astounding discrepancy ("Bruton appeared quite oblivious that these discrepancies existed"), and he centers about the pages with it like a captured Cup of Liberty.

In his printed narrative the "swords were up and the swords were down" on their way up to the hustings. On only, Stanley testified he saw "swords up and

down" when they got to the hustings. But oh, St. Sisypheus!—discrepancy here at all. . . . being led by counsel, had to say exactly as he could. . . . question asked, which is a thing what he saw done at the hustings. And he uses the words "swords up and down" in his narrative because, being a witness, he was later a prisoner. Manchester Statist. Soc. was describing what he saw. . . . ally saw through rising distance of some hundred yards the swords rising and falling. . . . Mr. Walsley allows that shared one or two other witnesses Stanley's testimony implies that the evidence is and unsupported. Such a case is made possible only by a cavalier way in which Mr. Walsley passes by the evidence in the inquest on John of Oldham, at which at least witnesses testified to seeing a man cry at the people's way to the hustings:

Coroner: At what pace did you come? . . . I saw Andrew Toots . . . think it was a trait it was a trait, and the crowd making way for them. . . . Q. Did you see them coming along, and they struck you when they were about half a mile from me . . . they seemed right and left before they came. . . . A. Yes, I saw them strike me. . . . Q. Well, what then? . . . A. Why they began to cut at the people like hordes. . . . William Norris, Buckley, and nephew to one of the trustees: There was a confusion when the soldiers rode into the crowd, and they began to lay about them with swords, in their way to the hustings, and when they arrived there, they cut the people that held the

Coroner: Do you know the death of John Lees? Elizabeth Farnes: No, I do not. . . . Q. Then why do you come? . . . A. Because I was cut. . . . Q. Where were you cut? . . . A. In the forehead. . . . raised her hand and got at her forehead. . . . I had a large wound on my forehead. . . . The Coroner: I don't know. . . . Where were you at the time? . . . A. About thirty yards from where the Justices were, and special constables. . . . Q. Were you cut in the back to the hustings, or on their way towards the hustings? . . . A. I was cut as they were towards the hustings. . . . this child (showing the child's arm). I was frightened and to protect it, held it up and side with the head downwards. . . . the blow. I desired them to

be the more representative group, with the greatest number of independently placed witnesses.

On Mr. Walsley's second disputed point—whether the Yeomanry struck one with their sabres on the way in the hustings—the honours are more even: rather more and more various witnesses said they did than said they did not. The fact that the jury (which was a special jury) found for Birley does not, in any case, indicate anything about their judgment on these parts of the evidence, since they were directed by the judge "that if the defendants were acting in the legal discharge of their duty, being called upon by the magistracy to act, the verdict ought to be for the defendants." Since the fact that the magistracy ordered the Yeomanry into the crowd is one of the few facts about Peterloo which was never disputed, the jury had no alternative but a verdict reached on such a basis can have no hindering power on the judgment of posterity.

In contrast to his faith in the "cloud of witnesses" in Redford v. Birley, Mr. Walsley evidently found the more authentic evidence given at the Oldham inquest too painful in read with precision. His few, selective references to it are generally inaccurate. Here is an example. He writes that one witness testified that he heard one of the Yeomanry say "there is that villain Saxton; run him through," which in the printed report of the proceedings is indicated, apparently to make it clear that it corroborated John Tyas's report in *The Times*. It did. The words were almost identical. Tyas had written: "There is that villain Saxton; do you run him through the body." This passage has been cited in modern times (footnote citing E. P. Thompson) as convincing testimony, without adding the information that this witness, "not being to himself," was dismissed from the courtroom as an incredible one.

The passage deserves detailed criticism, as exemplifying Mr. Walsley's pursuit of imaginary molehills and his ignorance of tangible mountains. The suggestion that the words quoted were italicized to indicate that they corroborated Tyas's report is pure attribution; it is very much more probable that they were italicized to distinguish quoted matter from the witnesses' own words. If Mr. Walsley had been discussing evidence supporting the Yeomanry he would probably have found that two witnesses corroborated each other offered final proof; in this case he suggests that corroboration suggests collusion. The witness, it is true, is reported as withdrawing, muttering, but there is nothing in the report to suggest that he was dismissed because "incredible"; he was dismissed because the coroner was out of patience, was seeking to abbreviate the proceedings, and was refusing to take evidence which did not bear directly upon the wounding of John Lees by the hustings; and the witness was muttering because he was not permitted to relate all the facts known by the Yeomanry which he knew:

Coroner: Do you mean to state, that you saw these two people, Harrison and Shelmardine, wound any body? . . . James Walker: I don't know that I saw Harrison wound any body, but I saw him attempt to wound both me and Mr. Saxton; and if I had not jumped at him, I am sure he would have cut me. I saw Shelmardine inflict a wound upon a person afterwards. . . . Q. Near the hustings? . . . A. No. . . . Q. Then this is the conclusion of your evidence: that you neither saw Shelmardine or Harrison wound any person at the hustings? Which was it that jumped at him? . . . I saw Shelmardine strike you? . . . I saw him. . . . The Coroner: That is all I ask you. The Witness: But I have not stated all I know. I saw different men wounded after that. . . . The Coroner: You are told, that is not evidence. Go about your business. (The Witness withdrew, muttering.)

The witness was not. In any case, the witness called by E. P. Thompson, unless Mr. Walsley has access to an edition of *The Making of the English Working Class* which is unknown to us, Mr. Thompson's name is unknown. Broadhurst, who appears some 300-odd pages earlier in the inquest, and who also testified (callously?) to the attack on Saxton, using the

words: "There's Saxton, damn him, run him through." This witness was not dismissed, nor accused of incredulity, nor did he mutter.

This, then, is Mr. Walsley's method. He batters away at remorselessly at every piece of evidence, accusatory of the Yeomanry that the reader, out of sheer tedium, is inclined to submit. The crowd attacked the peaceable Yeomanry (behind the hustings, where no one but Captain Birley could see it) and all followed on:

All the actors in that tragedy were victims. The radicals on the platform, the militiamen in the crowd, the peaceable in the crowd, the Yeomanry, the constables, the magistrates in their room, the captives in the New Bayley, were each and severally as much the victims of the tragic chain of circumstances, as the dead special constable lying in the Bull's Head, the wounded in the infirmary, and Mrs. Partington, crushed to death, lying at the bottom of the cellar steps.

If a case is constructed largely out of negations, it is logical that at the centre of it there will be, not a fact, but a hole. Mr. Walsley is well aware of this hole; who did, then, attack the Yeomanry? . . . he would have been wiser to have left it empty; but he could not resist the urge to fill it, and it is here, at the heart of his thesis, that his special pleading becomes excessive.

There was a row, in February, 1819, at Sandy Brow in Stockport, where some cavalry attempted to seize a Cup of Liberty, and where the radicals beat them off and crowded about it for months afterwards. Therefore it follows, as the night the day, that the hole can be filled by the Stockport contingent.

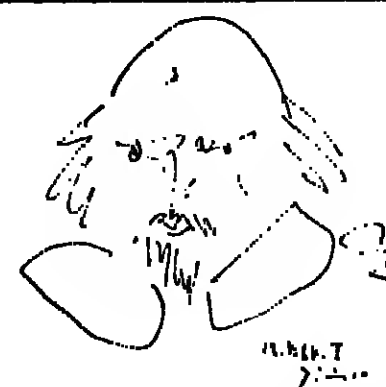
The evidence? They were behind the hustings. That is all: a mountain of speculation labours to produce this point, nothing more to uncertain evidence. No one, at the time or later, noticed what Mr. Walsley, now that 150 years of dust has settled, can now see: not even Captain Birley.

Moreover the noise is dressed up as a lion. First Tyas of *The Times* is pressed into service. He mentioned at Hunt's trial that while the crowd were cheering the Yeomanry on their first arrival at the edge of the field, "Mr. Hunt desired that some persons on the wagon (Huntings) might be removed, as they were neither speakers or writers, and were creating a disturbance." To Mr. Walsley, this incident suggests "a disruptive element in the crowd actively opposing the Huntian mob of proceeding—that of passive resistance." Well, does it? It seems to suggest an overcrowded stage and people jostling for place. But then, continues Mr. Walsley, how to account for the sinister evidence of George Swift, himself a radical speaker:

Hunt ordered the people to stand fast. "If they want me," said Mr. Hunt, "let me go—don't resist, don't rush, pointing to a place near him. . . . If they fellows won't be quiet, put them down and keep them down."

More evidence of a "disruptive element." And then there is the "remarkable" fact that James Moorhouse, the Stockport leader who accompanied Hunt to the hustings, was nevertheless not on the hustings during the action. What was he doing? And why did Hunt lead and push so much about all this at his trial? In fact, the reasons for this are ludicrously simple: first—Miss Matlock prints out this one Moorhouse had injured his hand in the door of the baroque and retired for medical attention; second, Crown witnesses swore to his presence on the hustings when it was simple to prove that he had been absent, and in all the contentious evidence, this was one point at which they could clearly be faulted and even accused of perjury.

But we are allowing ourselves, in full, headlong, into the trap which Mr. Walsley has spent half a lifetime in building. For of course these disputed matters do not affect, centrally, an understanding of Peterloo, even if Mr. Walsley's liberal criticisms of Prentice, Bamford, Bruton and Read, do invite a little of his own kind of correction in reply. Marshalling his thin case in support of the brickbats, Mr. Walsley



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That attack on the Yeomanry, if made, is to be considered as the "flashpoint" from which stemmed the inevitable explosion. Anything could happen after that, and in fact did.

This is the "heart of the matter" because "the success or failure of the radical version of Peterloo pivoted on whether this fact of striking the first blow could be pinned on the Yeomanry or not". But this is not the case. If a meeting of some 60,000 people is surrounded by cavalry and foot-soldiers and penetrated by hostile special constables, if Yeomanry are then sent into its midst to arrest its most clamorous orator, and if a member of the crowd then throws a brick at a yeoman (which is not proven), are the crowd then guilty of being ridden and shamed off the field?

Even by the infinitely nice legalisms of Mr. Walsley's own game, the military do not resort to instant and invasive retaliation at the moment when one of their members is assaulted. What Mr. Walsley has almost succeeded in making us do is to divert our attention from the actual attack on the crowd, and the nature of that attack. Give or take some emphasis this way or that, the events that preceded this attack are as follows.

A peaceable and fairly good-humoured crowd was assembled, and Hunt began to address it. Immediately the magistrates sent for the Yeomanry to assist the civil power to arrest the speakers in the midst of the assembly. The Yeomanry—local shopkeepers, dealers, dancing-masters and the rest (several of whom were probably drunk)—rallied fast towards the hustings, fanning out in disorder among the crowd as they came into it. As they reached the thickest part of the crowd the more disciplined or more humane probably only brandished their swords to make the crowd give way, but others struck out, and not only with the flints, but with the evidence of any brickbats, &c., being thrown at them until at least several minutes after they had reached and surrounded the hustings is excessively thin. Hunt—who until that moment had exerted himself for order and to prevent panic—was then arrested. Up to that moment the situation had still not passed beyond control, but simultaneously with that moment Hunt disappeared as if he had been shot. Said one witness the cry went up from the Yeomanry—"Leave at their flags!"—and the Peterloo Massacre really began. Some feeble attempts were made by the crowd to defend the costly embroidered banners and caps of Liberty which the female reformers had worked over so carefully, and which the reformers had carried so many miles to the meeting. The Yeomanry struck out right and left and the special constables, not to be deprived of their share of trophies of the field, joined in. The magistrates, seeing the Yeomanry in "difficulties", ordered the Hussars to clear the field. On the edge of the field, some of the people, finding themselves still pursued, made a brief stand.

Mr. Walsley, who has so much to say about unidentified Stockport militiamen, has almost no comment to offer on this—moment of unrestrained aggression which cannot by any special pleading be offered as self-defence. Nor is there much conflict of evidence about this, the real "flashpoint". Scarcely, who led the prosecution against Hunt, remained unconvinced about any attack upon the Yeomanry until this moment, and declared in a subsequent parliamentary debate: "Had they [the Yeomanry] stopped then no real damage would have been done, but they then began to attack." Tyas reported: "As soon as Hunt and Johnson had jumped from the wagon a cry was made by the cavalry, 'Have at their flags!' In consequence, they immediately dashed not only at the flags which were in the wagon, but those which were pushed among the crowd, cutting most indiscriminately to the right and to the left in order to get at them. This set the people running in all directions, and it was not until this net had been committed that any brickbats were hurled in the military. From that moment the Manchester Yeomanry Cavalry lost all command of temper.

Not even Captain Birley disputed the fact of this attack on the flags. His account through the medium of Lord Stanley declared that, when the magistrates' warrant had been executed,

considerable tumult prevailed, and a struggle ensued between the constables and those persons in the cart, who wished to save the caps of liberty, banners, &c. Some of those who resisted were taken into custody, and the soldiers, cut with their sabres, in doing this, it was possible that some persons had been hurt, but not intentionally.

It would perhaps be legitimate to point out that the magistrates' warrant was for the arrest of Hunt and not of a Cap of Liberty. We are bereft of independent witnesses to describe the sensation of being "hurt, but not intentionally", since neither Tyas (who himself had been arrested, in error) nor the Rev. Edward Stanley (who was in the field. We must, therefore, supply the hiatus in Mr. Walsley's account, by drawing upon the evidence of some of these biased victims to describe the temper of these moments:

William Harrison (cotton spinner): "We were all merry in hopes of better times."

Harriett: "Only with the swords—nobody asked us to disperse—only trying to cut our heads off with their swords."

"The soldiers began cutting and slaying", went on Harrison, "and the constables began to seize the colours, and the time was struck up; they all knew of the combination." Amidst such music, few passed to distinguish between flints and sabres:

Conner: "Did they cut at you near the hustings?"

Harrison: "No; as I was running away three soldiers came down upon me one after another: there was whizz this way and whizz that way, backwards and forwards, and I, as they were going to strike, threw myself on my face, so that if they cut, it should be on my bottom."

The Coroner: "You act as well as speak?"

Harrison: "Yes; I'm real Lancashire Hunt, Sir; I speak the truth; whenever any cried out 'mercy', they said 'Dann you, what brought you here?' Another witness related how a special constable jumped on the hustings, "took up the President's chair, and beat it about those who remained". Some of the crowd, he continued on all sides by Yeomanry, crawled under the carts which formed the platform for the hustings. According to one witness, John Lees (who later died) was one of these:

Jonah Andrew (cotton spinner): "I saw several constables round him, and beating him with truncheons severely. One of them picked up a staff of a banner that had been cut with a sword, and said, 'Dann your bloody eyes, I'll break your back.'"

This "self-defence" was pursued by Yeomanry and specials to the edges, and beyond the edges, of the field. Hunt, as he was taken to the magistrates' house, ran the gauntlet of special constables' batons. Even in the side-streets around the field the cavalry pursued the people, cutting at them and saying: "Dann you, I'll reform you;—You'll come again, will you?" Outside one house in Windmill Street, "special constables came up in great triumph, before my door, calling out, 'This is Waterloo for you! This is Waterloo!'"

Mr. Walsley is of course wrong to suppose that the snarling accounts of Peterloo by Bruton and Read represent, even if unwittingly, a perpetuation of the "radical" myth. A radical interpretation of the day, derived in part from witnesses such as those just quoted, would be far more savage than anything published since Baedeker or Prentice. It would see it as a clear moment of class war. Nor were the warriors only on the side of the magistracy. If Mr. Walsley had examined the Home Office papers he would have found evidence that both before the day (among those drilling on the moors) and afterwards (among those threatening vengeance) there were indeed most unpeaceable "militants"—among the reformers. Baedeker was—at least after Peterloo—very probably among them, although he gives himself a more sober character in his reminiscences. If his report of a spy is to be credited, he was



A contemporary woodcut reproduction, like the one on the facing page, from the *Jackdaw* folder No. 17 on Peterloo and Radical Reform, published by Cope at 11s. 6d.

still, three months later, venting his feelings in revolutionary rodomondo, and giving in a tavern the toast: "May the Tree of Liberty be planted in Hell, and may the bloody Butchers of Manchester be the Fruit of it!" As late as April, 1820, there was a fierce tavern brawl in Oldham between soldiers and townsmen, when one of the latter proposed the toast: "May the skin of every loyal man be taken off his back and made into parchment to beat the Reformers to arms!"

Undoubtedly among the huge crowd which assembled on that day there were some who felt absently that something large might come of it, and come suddenly to the raising of the poor and the throwing down of the rich. As one of the contingents marched in that morning they passed Roger Entwistle, an attorney and clerk to the race-course, and later a witness against Hunt: "I then had got a good cut in my back", one of the marchers shouted, "but I shall have as good a one as three before to-night is over."

All this was around, before and after Peterloo. But on the day itself the vast crowd was, definitely, under Hunt's control and subjected to his egotistical but emphatically constitutional strategy. He had spent the previous week in Manchester, seeing some of the leaders of contingents, and ensuring that his orders for peace and discipline were understood and would be obeyed. They were obeyed, and women and children came with the men upon the field. Hence Peterloo was not only a massacre, but a peculiarly cowardly one. Miss Marlow has discovered letters of Major Dynel, who commanded the two field-pieces which were held in readiness in the wings on the day: "The first action of the Battle of Manchester is over", he wrote, "and I am happy to say has ended in the complete discomfiture of the Enemy." He had been "very much assured to see the way in which the Volunteer Cavalry knocked the people about during the whole time we remained on the ground; the instant they saw ten or a dozen Mobkites together, they rode at them and leathened their property."

A radical interpretation, however, would re-examine with the greatest scrupulousness those parts of the received account which exonerate from blame in these events, not only the government, but also the magistracy; or which assume that the magistracy were guilty only of panic or ill-judgment, and that once they had sent the Yeomanry upon the field, all happened fortuitously. Both Prentice and J. E. Taylor offered powerful arguments against this at the time. The *Official Papers Relative to the State of the Country*, published by government in November, 1819, and offering a selection of the letters of magistrates to the Home Office, depositions, &c., should be regarded as being just as much a party statement—and should be examined as scrupulously—as any generally done this, although the *Papers* were selected and published in order to prevent any parliamentary enquiry: the information (Lord Liverpool admitted privately) "was laid safely, and much more advantageously, by Government directly rather than through the medium of any committee." Many of the questions asked by John Edward Taylor

in his brilliant and scathing *Nor and Observances, Critical and Factual, on the Papers Relative to the Internal State of the Country* (1820) have never found a satisfactory answer.

These questions are of the order most difficult to resolve—questions of intention: did the magistrates intend beforehand that an armed dispersal should take place? and of complicity—did Sidmouth assent to, or know of, any such intention? Mr. Walsley himself quotes important passages from a private, justifiable account which the Rev. W. R. Hay drew up for Sidmouth on October 7, 1819, and which was hitherto unpublished. In this he described the actions of the select committee of magistrates which was in almost continuous session in the days leading up to August 16:

"The Committee continued to meet, and did so on Saturday, [August] the 14th, Sunday, and Monday. Prior to the Saturday, different points had been discussed as to the propriety of stopping the Meeting and the manner of doing so. They were of opinion that Multitudes coming in columns with Flags and Marching in military array were even in the approach to the Meeting a tumultuous assembly, and it was for a little time under consideration whether each Column should not be stopped at their respective entrances into the Town, but this was given up; it was considered that the Military might then be distracted, and it was wished that the Town should see what the Meeting was, when assembled, and also that those who came should be satisfied they were assembled in an unlawful manner."

"Being satisfied", the account continues, "that in point of Law [the Meeting] it assembled as it was expected, would be an illegal Meeting, we gave notice to Lieut. Col. L'Estrange . . . of our wish to have the assistance of the Military on the 16th."

This is a clear enough statement of the magistrates' intention, although it does not amount to proof. It is abundantly evident that magistrates and military had a contingency plan for dispersing the meeting; and, at the very least, it would appear that Sidmouth was informed of this plan, from a letter in the Home Office papers dated August 18, in which Sidmouth conveyed to General Sir John Byng his satisfaction in the judgment of Colonel L'Estrange, the military commander on that day: "His Judgment has in Lord S.'s mind been evinced by his employing the Yeomanry in the Van agreeably to the Plan on which I know you intended to act." A contingency plan, it is true, does not amount to a fully proven intention, even when the first part of it—the assembling of the military forces—is put into effect. But there is altogether too much circumstantial evidence, as well as rumour, circulating on the Sunday and the Monday morning, to allow one to discount the possibility of such a fully-formed intention: the clearing of the field by the authorities, early on Monday morning, of all stones; the industrious preparation by the magistrates of depositions from prominent citizens that they were alarmed by the banners and military array of the crowd; the rumours such as those which reached the ears of J. E. Taylor:

"Early in the forenoon on August 16th persons supposed to be acquainted with the intentions of the magistrates distinctly asserted that Mr. Hunt would be arrested on the hustings, and the meeting dispersed. I myself was more than once told so, but could not conceive it possible."

The intention was expressed, the contingency plan was prepared, the military forces were assembled, the rumours and more-than-rumours were circulating; and yet we are still invited to believe that the dispersal of the crowd was fortuitous, and that the magistrates determined to send cavalry into the midst of it to arrest the speakers because one Richard Owen, a pawnbroker, swore an affidavit that Hunt had arrived and that "an immense mob is collected; and he considers 'the town in danger'." (The affrighted Richard Owen, in his alternating role as a special constable, is supposed to have signally distinguished himself on the field by capturing the black flag of the Saddle-Club or Death—"Equal Representation or Death"—the more stuff of which so many official witnesses at

subsequent proceedings both having thrown them into confusion and alarm.

There is a simpler explanation. Mr. Walsley's for Peterloo was a plan. It was put into operation. The magistrates knew, for hours, and perhaps days, before they arrived on the hustings, what they intended to do; the special constables were expecting their arrival at Yeomanry; the Yeomanry did, very much what was expected of them, although without the recognition for his work probably one of the factors in the depression that drove him to take his life. Since then his biographical novel, *der sechste sin*, has been published, and his plays are now being performed on Central European stages with increasing frequency. It is further evidence of the profound interest in Bayer's work that Rowohl have now brought out a separate, revised edition of *der sechste sin*. Gerhard Rühm has made a number of minor adjustments to the text, and gathered up sections of the manuscript appendices.

The context of *der sechste sin* is so closely related to the crises of Bayer's own life that it is easy to disentangle the one from the other. The book was written in the last months of that life, and contains several allusions to the possible suicide of Goldenberg, the central character. Finally Goldenberg does actually kill himself, without warning—"mitten in Giesbach", as his shocked friend Dohly puts it. And who is the young crowd? Was a lion, Mr. Walsley, in his zeal, has pronounced evidence as well. William Hulton has sort of attesting about him some of his fellow-magistrates—

an absence of humanitarianism and a contempt for general order. He offered to manfully apologise; Peterloo, indeed, he later told as the "proudest day" of his many years afterwards he kept it in his study. A gentleman of his breed and station does not merely have so great a landmark, a distance between himself and seditions plebs, that it is a matter of indifference to him whether or that is true of them or not.

Twelve years after Peterloo, after fact upon fact had been done for as long, Hulton would then a public letter containing a mass-farrago of mis-statements about day: "two people were killed at Peter's Field, one, a woman, having personated the Goddess Reason, was trampled to death by a crowd. . . . On the succeeding day, an old pensioner was beaten to death with purpurs of his own blood, because he had expressed a loyal sentiment to the King". He was an ally convinced, in 1831 as he had been in 1817, that the defence of "vast acies" of our liberties required the hunting of Jacobins and sharpening of swords. The day of the Tories in South Lancashire in the Reform election of 1832 was only an adjustment of the "A few despondent individuals" Hulton of Hulton, later reported that met in a companion police in Newton-le-Willows: "It occurred to them that it was their duty to call up every friend to the monarchy and the Church to counteract the machinations of the 'Jacobins'." 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Concrete utopianism

ERNST BLOCH: *Atheismus in Christentum*. 382pp. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp. OM 16.

Professor Sewing's upposition of the axiomatic and the postulationist approaches finds its clearest expression in his comments on Kant's doctrine of synthetic *a priori* judgments. According to the axiomatic approach they are, he holds, conceived as possessing an inner necessity which is independent of experience; whereas according to the postulationist approach they are conceived as conditions for the possibility of experience. Yet Kant has argued quite explicitly and firmly that the non-logical necessity of, say, the principle of causality can be explained only by conceiving it as a condition of the possibility of experience. He regarded this account as one of his most distinctive and important contributions and would, to judge by his comments on similarly drastic reinterpretations, have angrily rejected any suggestion that in propounding this doctrine he was the victim of a hidden confusion.

Yet it is definitely atheism, modernism and Marxism which he wants to support: God, for him, does not exist, nor does anything transcendental. However, the first part of his thesis which gives the appearance of being concerned with Christians thereby becomes rather dubious, because his Christians, deprived of God and Christ, merely believe that Jesus was a revolutionary- the most important among the many whose stories are shown to abound in the Bible.

Yet, whatever one may think of Professor Swing's success in establishing his main exegetical theses, one cannot but admire his singleness of purpose and his philosophical seriousness—as well as his historical erudition, which finds expression in some illuminating asides.

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PAUL ROUBICZEK: *Ethical Values in the Age of Science.* 317pp. Cambridge University Press. £3 (Paperback, 17s.).

The key to understanding the problems which these sciences have failed to understand is said to be the Subjective Knowledge. Here, and for the rest of the book, the dominant influence upon Mr. Roubizek is that of Kierkegaard. Like Kierkegaard, Mr. Roubizek writes with passion, but without either the inspiration or the wit of his master. The result is that the reader is sometimes bored and sometimes bewildered by passages which appear to be arguments, but which are often mere statements. There is an arbitrariness, and also a certain degree of superficiality, in the pages devoted to the statement that there are three and only three absolute values—truth,

knowledge, which is the only kind of knowledge relevant to values, is recognized to be knowledge by the peculiar *feeling* of conviction which it carries. Mr. Roubiczek is perfectly aware of the dangers of such a doctrine. He knows that enthusiasm is not always well-placed, and that fanaticism is, so far as its description goes, indistinguishable from subjective knowledge of values. He is confident, nevertheless, that a distinction *can* be made between genuine knowledge (knowledge, that is, of genuine non-scientific truth and of other absolute values), and false or merely fanatical belief. The distinction *can* be made only by faith. Ethics, then, in the last analysis emerges as irrational, subject to no proofs, but those of subjective conviction. Perhaps, invoking the Kierkegaardian fire, Mr. Roubiczek does not quite succeed in making this point clearer.



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11 DECEMBER 1969

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Commentary

"Police seize 'Mendicant Professor'" says the headline on the front page of the *Singapore Underdog* of November 25. Fortunately D. J. Enright, who earned that infelicitous title from the Singapore Minister of Labour on the occasion of his inaugural lecture there nine years ago, has not himself been imprisoned, but it does appear that his ironically named *Mendicant Professor* have, to judge from the experience of one of the Singapore bookshops. This firm was told that a consignment of the book, addressed to them, had been confiscated at the docks. Other bookshops, who were then promptly canvassed by one of the *Underdog's* student correspondents, refused to say categorically whether or not this work had been banned; merely that "none of them were willing to accept orders" for it.

Eventually, after getting a blank-faced disclaimer from the police, the correspondent was told by the Ministry of Culture, one of the principal aggrieved parties in Professor Enright's earlier brush with the government, that his book was being studied by a parliamentary committee. It would be surprising if this slightly mysterious body were to find anything in evidence in the author's previous writings, which have often enough been critical of the ruling People's Action Party and Mr. Lee Kuan Yew, though not, we would have thought, without constructive intentions, or humour, or a warm and infectious liking for the country.

The agreement between Mr. Enright and the authorities on that earlier occasion, so he learned slightly to his own surprise, was that he would not comment locally on local affairs. Admittedly his book has been adversely criticized in the *Straits Times* and by Alex Jovey on the official Singapore Radio (Mr. Jovey having written a 650-page biography of Mr. Lee and worked as his Press Relations Officer), but it would be surprising if its appearance in London nearly a year ago were thought to infringe the agreement. Seen from this end, certainly, Singapore's distinguished Professor of English is an advertisement for that small country, not least because he shows that practical criticism, as well as the purely Eng. Lit. variety, is possible there, to a degree unusual in the Far East. To the ignorant Londoner it says something for the place if Mr. Enright feels he is of use to it, as he quite plainly does.

What could bring hundreds of people from all over the country to Oxford for a bitterly cold weekend, to be fully occupied for twelve hours a day for five days? No, not a pop festival or a political conference, but the fourth History Workshop held at Ruskin College on November 29 and 30. The attendance was 600—more than twice as many as last year. The Buxton Hall was packed, and the proceedings had to be relayed to adjoining rooms, while overflow

meetings were held elsewhere for the papers to be re-read and re-discussed with fresh audiences.

The main theme was nineteenth-century working-class history—suitably enough, in view of Ruskin's background. Obvious highlights were papers by Professor Gwyn Williams on "Merthyr Tydfil and the Riots of 1831" and Dr. Eric Hobsbawm on "The New Working Class World, 1880-1914", but the most interesting sessions were those on the Saturday afternoon, devoted to "Proletarian Oxfordshire". This was a remarkable experience. Ruskin staff and students giving the results of their collective research into original sources (including taped interviews with local residents) to appreciative and often well-informed listeners.

Some of this material is to be published shortly as the first "History Workshop Pamphlet" and it is hoped to publish further pamphlets early next year, including more material from Oxfordshire, as well as important new work on the origins of the London anarchist movement and a fascinating study of the role of students in the Paris Commune.

It is perhaps significant that such an occasion should be arranged by an extra-mural college, and that the publication of its material should also be outside the established system. One encouraging exception to this was that St. John Thomas, the new Bloomsbury bookshop specializing in economic and social history, took the trouble to bring some of its stock to Ruskin, where it enjoyed a brisk sale alongside the student magazines and the publications of the left-wing groupings.

Anyone who is interested in genuine original work in history, rather than mere drudgery for examinations or theses, should certainly look out for the next History Workshop, and in the meantime there seems to be a good opportunity for an enterprising publisher to break out of the magic circles of professional academics and popularizers for some new authors.

The Royal Opera have at long last put on Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande*. Apart from three performances by the Paris Opera Company in 1949 *Pelléas* has, incredibly, not been heard at Covent Garden since 1937. To mark the event we asked Edward Lockspeiser (p. 1429) to appraise the work and influence of Debussy's collaborator Maurice Maeterlinck.

The years have not been entirely fair to Maeterlinck, but the influence of his Symbolist and anti-naturalist theatre around the turn of the century was far-reaching (it touched Yeats) and may well be sensed today in the plays of, for example, Beckett. The poetic suggestiveness which was often mere decoration on the lid of aggressive impulse, won him the Nobel Prize and earned him the kind of hyperbolic appropriations which invariably tell against a living force for the works which they aim to promote. Thus Octave Mirbeau, in 1890 in *Le Figaro* of Maeterlinck's first play *La Princesse Maleine*: "... greatest work of genius of our time... com-

parable, and shall I dare say it? superior in beauty to whatever is most beautiful in Shakespeare". Twenty-three years later the enthusiasm was unmitigated, although the frame of reference is now "Tennison": "What Goethe was to the life of Europe in the opening decades of the nineteenth century, Maeterlinck is today" (Johann Bihell; *Maurice Maeterlinck*, 1913).

As Mr. Lockspeiser points out, the brutality latent in Maeterlinck's work was patent in the man, Maeterlinck, he tells us, though outwardly shy was none the less a boxer of sufficient professional standing to challenge the redoubtable prize-fighter Georges Carpentier in the ring (this apparently does not relate to his work). When Maeterlinck's mistress Georgette Leblanc was passed over for the role of Mélisande in the opera, Maeterlinck took this as provocation enough the was by no means unaware that Mlle. Leblanc's natural talent fell some way short of her own assessment of it) to challenge Debussy to a duel. The duel never took place, although it had an innocent victim in Maeterlinck's pet cat whom he shot dead while engaged in pistol practice for the occasion.

These particular outbursts were due to unconscious recognition that the musical aspirations of his Symbolist aesthetic lost their force and made *d'être* las Mallarmé had warned when realized in the musical art of Debussy. Maeterlinck's word now lives in Debussy's music and that is perhaps remembrance enough. Nevertheless, some of Maeterlinck's better plays should surely be given an occasional airing on the stage: *La Princesse Maleine* (1889) (to which Debussy was, for reasons of his own, very anxious of the Royal Society to ensure that the transfer of his work was carefully observed in the Southern Hemisphere). The second of his *Trilogies*, *Les Aveugles* (1890), and *Les Éclairs* (1891) (to which Debussy was, for reasons of his own, very anxious of the Royal Society to ensure that the transfer of his work was carefully observed in the Southern Hemisphere).

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As Mr. Lockspeiser points out, the brutality latent in Maeterlinck's work was patent in the man, Maeterlinck, he tells us, though outwardly shy was none the less a boxer of sufficient professional standing to challenge the redoubtable prize-fighter Georges Carpentier in the ring (this apparently does not relate to his work). When Maeterlinck's mistress Georgette Leblanc was passed over for the role of Mélisande in the opera, Maeterlinck took this as provocation enough the was by no means unaware that Mlle. Leblanc's natural talent fell some way short of her own assessment of it) to challenge Debussy to a duel. The duel never took place, although it had an innocent victim in Maeterlinck's pet cat whom he shot dead while engaged in pistol practice for the occasion.

These particular outbursts were due to unconscious recognition that the musical aspirations of his Symbolist aesthetic lost their force and made *d'être* las Mallarmé had warned when realized in the musical art of Debussy. Maeterlinck's word now lives in Debussy's music and that is perhaps remembrance enough. Nevertheless, some of Maeterlinck's better plays should surely be given an occasional airing on the stage: *La Princesse Maleine* (1889) (to which Debussy was, for reasons of his own, very anxious of the Royal Society to ensure that the transfer of his work was carefully observed in the Southern Hemisphere). The second of his *Trilogies*, *Les Aveugles* (1890), and *Les Éclairs* (1891) (to which Debussy was, for reasons of his own, very anxious of the Royal Society to ensure that the transfer of his work was carefully observed in the Southern Hemisphere).

It is perhaps significant that such an occasion should be arranged by an extra-mural college, and that the publication of its material should also be outside the established system. One encouraging exception to this was that St. John Thomas, the new Bloomsbury bookshop specializing in economic and social history, took the trouble to bring some of its stock to Ruskin, where it enjoyed a brisk sale alongside the student magazines and the publications of the left-wing groupings.

Anyone who is interested in genuine original work in history, rather than mere drudgery for examinations or theses, should certainly look out for the next History Workshop, and in the meantime there seems to be a good opportunity for an enterprising publisher to break out of the magic circles of professional academics and popularizers for some new authors.

The Royal Opera have at long last put on Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande*. Apart from three performances by the Paris Opera Company in 1949 *Pelléas* has, incredibly, not been heard at Covent Garden since 1937. To mark the event we asked Edward Lockspeiser (p. 1429) to appraise the work and influence of Debussy's collaborator Maurice Maeterlinck.

The years have not been entirely fair to Maeterlinck, but the influence of his Symbolist and anti-naturalist theatre around the turn of the century was far-reaching (it touched Yeats) and may well be sensed today in the plays of, for example, Beckett. The poetic suggestiveness which was often mere decoration on the lid of aggressive impulse, won him the Nobel Prize and earned him the kind of hyperbolic appropriations which invariably tell against a living force for the works which they aim to promote. Thus Octave Mirbeau, in 1890 in *Le Figaro* of Maeterlinck's first play *La Princesse Maleine*: "... greatest work of genius of our time... com-

A style to confront the void

THE EXISTENTIALIST ESSAYS OF E. M. CIORAN

furthest reaches of the self, in situations transfiguration, may be heard a noise, a sound, a *sondus*, which by its very existence must either paralyse us forever or preserve our life anew.

At Cioran develops his meditations on death in ways that recall Rilke: for those who can bear the answering, alluring tone from deep within themselves, death becomes no mere impersonal problem, but a reality all their own, their *deus*. Whereas those "who cannot benefit from their possibilities of non-existence are strangers to themselves: puppets, objects furnished with a self, numbed by a neutral time that is neither duration nor eternity."

Cioran does not, however, relate his own spiritual exercises here to those of his older contemporaries, but to those of the desert fathers, and asks: "In order to beat this *torment* we must infuse a desert within ourselves." What he shares with the early mystics can scarcely be their faith in God; it is rather their "true, inner sentiment of death" power, that is, the "eternal sentiment of death" which religious generally are "faintly". What M. Cioran admires in the desert fathers appears to be the superior aesthetic quality of their response. He blames those mystics who, in their religious zeal, regarded death as only an obstacle to be surmounted, a barrier which separated them from God.

If religious have made of it [death] only a pretext or a scarecrow, a weapon of propaganda, it is the duty of the unbelievers to see that justice is done, to reach death and to restore all its rights.

When finally M. Cioran makes clear, in a diaphanously lyrical passage, what these "rights" are, and indeed what the "torment" is in which he has been referring so frequently, the state he describes sounds like nothing so much as Nietzsche's account of Dionysian inspiration: it is a rapture about which art, especially the Romantic art, speaks in us more frequently than does the Christian religion.

If we succeed, certain harmonies flow through our blood, our veins dilate, our secrets and our resources appear on the surface of ourselves, where desire and disgust, horror and rapture mingle in obscure and mysterious festivity.

M. Cioran's concern, then, is with creativity, and with its dreaded opposite, sterility. Death represents to him what it represented to Nietzsche: a "kind of generative negation, a return to our roots". We die, creatively speaking, when we cling too fast to the "definite": the "beneficial" factor is, therefore, "chaos"—a word which echoes Nietzsche again, which we must "succeed with all our intelligence" to "we shall waste our last reserves; for death sustains and stimulates our growth within us, preventing it from growing old."

The characteristic existentialist paradox emerges, however, in M. Cioran's last paragraph. Even when we have made of it [death] only a pretext or a scarecrow, a weapon of propaganda, it is the duty of the unbelievers to see that justice is done, to reach death and to restore all its rights.

Cioran's last paragraph. Even when we have made of death "an affirmation of life", it soon begins to appear that we have merely "converted its abyss into a solitary *jeitoun*". Worse still, we have "exhausted" our arguments and are once again "annihilated" by stagnation and depression. In other words, the moment of ecstatic, creative illumination is essentially brief: once achieved and expressed, it falls victim, like everything else, to the "merciless vision" of our sceptical intelligence. M. Cioran exploits this paradox in his essays, but he does not explain it. Indeed, at the level of already very complex self-inquiry at which he is writing, even the definition of a possible point from which further self-explanation could be achieved would itself be highly problematical. M. Cioran is already adept at the art of "thinking against oneself"—a Nietzschean phrase which is the title of one of his essays—and part of the cursed condition he describes is that all things become drawn into the same destructive play of the mind.

Some light is reflected back on to his position from outside, however, whenever M. Cioran deals with religious topics, as he does rather frequently. He is fascinated by the character of religions, and particularly of mystical experience, even though for him too there is nothing wrong with the cliché that God is dead, except perhaps that it is a cliché. With evident approval he quotes Flaubert's remark, "I am a mystic and I believe in nothing". The essay which he seeks is, in fact, most often defined in religious language with the religious content always denied or inverted.

Once we have ceased linking our secret life to God, we can ascend to ecstasies as effective as those of the mystics and conquer this world without recourse to the Beyond. What matters are our sensations, their intensity and their virtues, as our capacity to fling ourselves into a madness that is *not sacred*.

The notion that man has, as it were, wasted on a nebulous heaven his own best spiritual energies is at least as old as Feuerbach. M. Cioran is defending an aesthetic version of this idea, exploring with such psychological acuity the essentially human basis of religious fervour, that the familiar larger questions get lost in view. Why, for instance, should God have been the goal of western man's vision and imagination? And what of the most remarkable spiritual development? (Have we any comparable ecstasies here experienced *without* a sacred character? Even if it is assumed that the ecstasy is prior to the naming of it, can it be given any name?)

M. Cioran does not debate theological questions in their own terms, of course, but provides a kind of psychological "mock-up," which is constructed out of his understanding of his own intellectual habits as an author, to expose the nature of religious belief. The central impulse appears to be a spirit of denial, of resistance to the evils of existence, of negation of the world altogether. The strength of Christianity lies in the violence with which it has its enemies; even in prayer he depicts an aggressive attitude towards the unknown, towards "God". This is a variation of the compensatory function of religion amongst the underdogs in the universal struggle for power. As with Nietzsche, the question remains unsolved of how entirely negative feelings of *reventement* or worse could have inspired such a rich variety of positive human attitudes over the ages. More patently, such explanations seem to reflect the psychological situations of their authors. An aggressively negative attitude is the one kind of creative position open to a writer who has no belief or commitment except to his own "authenticity".

M. Cioran declares that he feels personal involvement with the world only through the medium of his ill:

Il n'est impossible de traiter de rien d'extérieur, d'objectif, d'impersonnel, à moins que ce ne soit de nuire, c'est-à-dire de ce qui, chez autrui, me fait penser à moi.

What interests him is less the positive fact or possible outcome of such "sympathy", as it might be called in a more conventional religious account of the matter, but rather its negative source. The whole of the material world has this negative character for M. Cioran, and to explain it he resurrects the myth of the demigod, the wicked worker god, who is responsible for the fallen earth in various Gnostic and Manichaean sects of the early centuries A.D. It was, he asserts, an error on the part of the Church to condemn their views as heretical, and to have saddled God with all the evils of creation; theology then had the impossible task of explaining them away again.

Comme le mal preside à tout ce qui est corrompible, autant dire à tout ce qui est vivant, c'est une tentative ridicule que de vouloir démontrer qu'il n'est rien d'être que le bien, ou même qu'il n'est comment d'existence. C'est qu'il n'est rien d'être que le mal, ou même qu'il n'est comment d'existence. C'est qu'il n'est rien d'être que le mal, ou même qu'il n'est comment d'existence.

It should not be imagined that M. Cioran's object is to save the God of tradition, even on his own arguments, to have cut God off from the world, which is the active principle—"un miracle effrayant"—would only have made him more bloodless and intellectual. Whatever power the Christian message has exerted over the minds of men has surely come from the unique degree of involvement which it posits between the divine and the here and now. M. Cioran's demigod is not really a "god" at all so much as a psychological safety valve: it provides the imagination with a convenient symbol of exorcism. We place the blame for our weaknesses and miseries outside ourselves and feel better. In other words, this negative god is there to be denied.

By a kind of spiritual algebra this negating of the negative could perhaps lead to a positive sense of life. At the end of the title essay, "Les mauvais demigods", M. Cioran seems in hint at the possibility of some other vision of existence beyond the doubts and disgust aroused by the demigod, a vision in which only the sense of wonder would remain and fear would be gone. We are reminded of many similar hopes entertained by thinkers as diverse as Nietzsche and Wittgenstein: that beyond the falsifications of the mind we could achieve a simple awareness and even affirmation of the world.

M. Cioran is hinting at something similar again in the essay "Les nouveaux dieux", where he urges a "pagan diletantisme" in place of inward-looking monism; and, in yet another place he declares:

If I were asked what man I most envied, I should answer without hesitation: the one who, taking his ease among words, lives there naively, by reflex, not questioning or identifying them with signs, as if they corresponded to reality itself or as if they were an absolute straw in the everyday.

But, of course, this condition is not what M. Cioran achieves, or even seriously believes in. He remains caught in an endless perpetuation of the negative principle itself, creating an endless play of ambiguities around the absolute he can neither achieve nor leave alone: a rival, as he says, of the demigod.

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Applications are invited from Chartered Librarians with substantial experience of library administration. Removal expenses up to £100. Housing accommodation, if required.

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